

# Jackson County Historical Society News

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JULY 2009



*Shields-Ethridge Homeplace 1884, left to right; Susan Ellas Shields Ethridge, Nancy Hill Shields, Aunt Jarva and neighbors.*

The Jackson County Historical Society will meet at the Shields-Ethridge Farm in Jefferson on July 23 at 6:00 p.m. Members are invited for a Hot Dog picnic and viewing of the *Ethridge Home Movies*. New members are welcome. *Directions: From I85N take exit 137 (Jefferson, Hwy 129), travel east to Etheridge Rd. (319), turn right and travel to 2355 Etheridge Road. Parking is in the field on the left side of the road. The Farm complex is on the right side of the road. For information call Caine Campbell at 706-654-9066*

*Jackson County Historical Society*

*P.O. Box 1234, Commerce, Georgia 30529*

*(706) 335-5946*

## Newsletter

The Jackson County Historical Society News is published quarterly and mailed before the next meeting. Back issues can be obtained for \$3.00 each plus postage. Some of the past newsletters can be viewed online at: [rootsweb.com/~gajackso/](http://rootsweb.com/~gajackso/)

The Historical Society's collection of books, files and research materials are housed in the Heritage Room of the Commerce Public Library.

Queries will be published in the next issue. Please send by September 15, 2009.

## Dues for 2009–2010 year

The dues year runs from July to July. Checks can be mailed to:

Jackson County Historical Society  
P. O. Box 1234, Commerce, GA 30529:

Individual –\$15  
Family –\$25  
LIFE member –\$100

## JCHS Officers 2009-2010

President:	Caine Campbell
Vice-President:	Shirley Wilson
Recording Secretary:	Doris Lord
Corresponding Secretary:	Boniface McDaniel
Treasurer:	Tommy Benton
Directors:	James Mathis Ann Jarrett Jerry Legg
Past Presidents:	Joyce Ethridge Ann A. Jarrett Richard Chambers Jean H. Booth Betty Ann Mathis James Mathis Ralph Freeman Carol Tanner Marie Parks Tina Harris Charlotte Mealor
Newsletter Editor:	Tina Harris

## Meeting Schedule

### July

The July Hot Dog picnic will be held on Thursday, July 23 at the Shields-Ethridge Heritage Farm at 6:00 p.m. Those wishing to join the Historical Society and current members may pay dues at this meeting.

The *Ethridge Home Movies* will be viewed at the picnic. This film is such a wonderful addition to their archives. Margie Compton, Ruta Abolins and the University of Georgia staff received a *National Film Preservation grant* of \$11,000.00 to restore eight 16mm reels. The running time is 53:36 minutes.

### October

The October 18 meeting will be held in Nicholson where we will meet at City Hall and ramble in a bus to the *Cross Roads Negro School House* built as early as 1881. We will also visit the cemetery for this community where an early church existed. This is Nicholson's first designation of Historic property and beginning of Historic designation application to the State.



*Wheat house at the Shields-Ethridge Farm*

*The following text is excerpted from the Shields/Ethridge Farm website at [www.shieldsetridgefarm.org](http://www.shieldsetridgefarm.org)*

## The Shields-Ethridge Heritage Farm

The Farm is an outdoor, agricultural museum that functions as an educational and interpretative facility in northeast Georgia.

The Shields-Ethridge Heritage Farm Foundation, Inc. was created in 1994 as a non-profit organization established to preserve the existing buildings on the 152 acres. The Foundation's Board of Directors is represented by members of the Ethridge family and others with interest in historic preservation. Susan Chaisson serves as the Board's President. The Farm is unique for its collection of intact historic buildings that exist in their original location. The mission of the Shields-Ethridge Farm is: *To provide and operate an educational and interpretative outdoor museum that uses historic preservation to increase an awareness and understanding of Georgia's agricultural and natural history.*

The Shields-Ethridge Farm was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 25, 1992 as a historic district that includes 65 historic resources on over 500 acres dating from the 1800-1930s. *The district is significant for representing an intact piedmont Georgia farmstead with a multitude of agricultural, industrial, and domestic resources (National Register nomination).* The Shields-Ethridge Farm was originally settled in 1799 by James Shields and remains as an active farm today.

The Shields-Ethridge Farm received a Georgia Centennial Heritage Farm Award in 1994 from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources the recognizes farms of exceptional historical value. The Shields-Ethridge Farm has remained in the same family for almost 200 years. Historic, agricultural buildings like the cotton gin, grist mill, wheat house, and mule barn remain on the Farm and are used for educational and interpretive purposes.

In 1995, the Shields-Ethridge Farm received two historic preservation grants prepared by the Northeast Georgia Regional Development Center. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources / Historic Preservation Division awarded the Shields-Ethridge Farm a Georgia Heritage 2000 grant totaling \$10,000. This grant along with matching funds from the Foundation were used to restore Bachelors' Academy, the Farm's 1909 schoolhouse. The schoolhouse is used to host visitors to the farm and provide interpretative space for the museum.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation awarded the Shields-Ethridge Farm a \$2,000 Preservation Services Fund grant for the preparation of a Landscape Master

Plan. This plan, prepared by Robinson Fisher Associates, Inc. provided recommendations on enhancements to the Farm that would preserve its historic context. The master plan also identified potential sites for a welcome center, parking, nature trails, and other facilities. These enhancements and additions are intended to accommodate increased demand for visitation to the Farm.

In 1997, The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation awarded Mrs. Joyce Ethridge their annual *Award for Stewardship* for her dedication to historic preservation and work in creating the Shields-Ethridge Farm. Mrs. Ethridge is credited with establishing the Shields-Ethridge Farm Foundation and donating 154 acres of the historic farm for its use in a museum.

The History Channel awarded a grant to the Shields-Ethridge Heritage Farm in 2007 to help preserve the history of cotton farming and farm life in Jackson County. The Jackson County Comprehensive High School was the Farm's educational partner, and students created permanent products such as a diorama, an interpretive visual display, and informational video about the Farm. Students and teachers from JCHS prepared scripts to explain the process of growing, harvesting, and ginning cotton, as well as attending a two-room school house. Costumes were created for the docents, who guided third grade students from Jackson County while visiting the farm. Costumes were created for the docents. The partnership will continue, and is described on the Save our History website: <http://www.history.com>.

The Shields Ethridge Farm has been awarded a second Watson Brown Grant from the *Athens Junior Board*. A check in the amount of \$6975.00 was presented on June 17, 2009 to Susan Chaisson by Shanon Hayes, Advisor, Athens Area WBF Junior Board of Trustees and Program Coordinator, T.R.R. Cobb House, and Maria Antonetti, Watson Brown junior board member. Renna Tuten, archivist was also present.

The Farm hosts many events and regular visitors. The annual *Mule Day* events are open to the general public. They include demonstrations of traditional farm equipment and animals by Georgia Old Time Plow Club. Area school children are also regular visitors to the Farm and represent the largest visitation group. The farm complex has a fully stocked commissary, blacksmith shop (*being restored*), cotton gin, grist mill, wheat house, and many other historic farm buildings.

## Joseph Shields

When Joseph Shields bought this land in 1802, his first job was to clear the land and plant crops. He used a crosscut saw to fell trees and an axe to cut wood for fuel. Even before building a home, Joseph Shields had to plant his first crop, so that his family could eat. Once a field was cleared, tools like a hoe or hand plow were used to prepare the field.

Grain crops, like corn and wheat were planted. As the crops grew, there was work to do. In the summer the corn was tall and the *ears* were large. The kernels yellowed and hardened. The corn stalks were cut and tied into bundles, called *shuck stacks*. They stood in rows, like little teepees. In the fall the bundles were opened and the ears were pulled from the stalks. The outside of the ear, or *husk* was removed, and piles of husked corn were taken to the barn.

Everyone in the family helped shell the corn. Two ears were rubbed together until all the kernels fell off. Small pieces of the husks remained, called *chaff*. A blanket was spread on the ground, and the shelled corn was poured onto it from a pail. The wind blew the chaff away, and now the corn is *grist*, ready to go to the grist mill to be ground.

Wheat was another grain Joseph Shields planted. Like corn, it required hard work to harvest. A sickle, or a scythe was used to cut the wheat.

The stalks were gathered into *sheaves*, which were stacked to dry. The stacks were called *shocks*. Once dry, the grain was forced out by hitting the grain with a *flail*. The flail was two sticks tied together at the end. The flailed wheat was then placed into a winnowing basket and tossed into the air. Unwanted chaff went out, while grain stayed in the basket. The separation of wheat from chaff is called *threshing*.

Perhaps you've heard the saying: *Keep your nose to the grindstone!* It comes from grist mill days. Both corn and wheat grain had to be ground to be used for bread and other foods. The grindstones at the grist mill reduced corn to meal and wheat grain to flour. The grist mill at the Shields-Ethridge Heritage Farm was built in 1900. Before that time, corn and wheat grain were crushed by hand mills.

When the corn or wheat grain arrived at the grist mill it was poured down a *hopper*. Below the hopper were two stones, an upper, or *runner* stone, and a lower, or *bedstone*. The lower stone did not move, but the up-

per stone spun around. The grain fell from the hopper through a hole in the center of the upper stone, called the *eye*. The grain spread outward between the two stones, which ground it into flour or meal.

The miller could adjust the how fast the grain fell between the stone. He could also adjust how fine the grain was ground by changing the space between the two stones. The meal passed between the stones and fell into a chute, called a *trough*. Finally, the grain fell into the grain bag.

The mill wheel could be powered by water or by steam. It turned the wheel connection and through gears turned the mill stone.

## Blacksmith shop

A visit to the blacksmith's shop at the Shields-Ethridge Heritage Farm is like visiting the hardware store 100 years ago. Around the shop you'll see an oxen yoke, wagon wheels, barrel hoops, and an assortment of plows. Everything was *made from scratch* at the Farm,

The blacksmith could make parts for the cotton gin, pot hooks for the home, spikes, nails, hinges, and latches. When something broke, the blacksmith could repair it. The blacksmith is part scientist (*metallurgy is the name of the science*) and craftsman (*creating something unique*).

## Plowing

Every crop grown at the Shields-Ethridge Heritage Farm depended upon the soil. The plow was a very important tool for the farmer. It broke the soil and was pulled by mules, before the tractor was invented. The first plows were wooden, but about the time Joseph Shields began to farm here, cast-iron plows were used.

Blacksmiths made plows for different purposes, to break, flatten, or till the soil. Flattening, or harrowing was a second step in preparing to plant. Tilling was a way to weed around the growing plants.

## Cotton crop

Cotton was the main crop at the Shields-Ethridge Heritage Farm after the Civil War. Textile mills bought cotton and spun it into cloth. It would take about 360 bolls like this one to make a pair of jeans.

Planting, cultivating, and picking cotton was hard work, and the whole family helped. Cotton seed was planted in April, after the fields had been plowed. As the

plants grew, they had to be thinned, or *chopped*. Plants were also fertilized to help them grow. They were also *mopped* with insecticide to keep the boll weevil away. The boll weevil was a beetle that burrowed inside the boll and destroyed it.

Farmers called the boll weevil, the *Winged Devil*. The bolls were picked and placed on a cotton sheet. The sheets were taken by wagon to the gin, where the seeds were removed. Before Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin, seeds were removed by hand. It might take a whole day to *gin* a pound of cotton by hand. With the first cotton gin, hand-cranked, 50 pounds of cotton could be ginned in a day. Ira Ethridge's cotton gin, powered by a steam boiler and engine, ginned 500 pounds of cotton in 21 minutes!

The *Through and Through Gin* that you will see at the Shields-Ethridge Farm could process cotton from wagon to finished bale in one process. Ira Ethridge was very proud of the Lummus gin he purchased. Neighbors brought their cotton to the Ethridge gin to be processed. Wagons, loaded with *seed cotton* waited their turn at the gin.

When it was his turn, the driver pulled his wagon onto the scale, to weigh both wagon and cotton. The weighing was repeated when the wagon was empty, to find out how many pounds of cotton had been delivered.

After weighing, a suction tube brought the seed cotton inside the gin. First, a *boll trap* removed bolls that were green (*not ripe*), rocks, or other hard materials from the cotton. Then the cotton was pulled to a separator, where it dropped onto a sealed conveyer belt that carried the cotton to a *distributor* above a gin stand. Inside the gin stand were 80 *saws*. A cylinder with rows of teeth (*saws*) turned against another with stiff wire brushes. The cotton was pulled through the metal teeth, leaving the seed behind. The wire brushes swept the fibers away from the teeth. The cotton seed fell into a basket beneath the gin stand and was either sold to Ira Ethridge and sent to his seed house, or was saved for the farmer to pick up at the *seed drop*. The lint was sent to the bale press, where the lint was squeezed into 500 pound bales, wrapped with brown cloth, and tied with metal straps about two inches wide. The bale was sent to the loading platform, where the farmer was waiting with the wagon.

## Grist Mill

Although the Shields-Ethridge farm was primarily a cotton farm, corn and wheat were also grown. The grist mill provided ground meal for family, tenants, and neighbors. It also included a hammer mill and planing mill that were powered by an International Harvester engine. The planing mill was used to dress lumber sawn on the farm. It's likely that the blacksmith shop workers also operated the grist mill machinery since the grist mill wasn't operated continuously.

## Cotton Gin Office

The building is significant as the gin's business center, where Mr. Ira oversaw the cotton gin's operation. It contains a safe, desks for record keeping, and a well-lit workspace. Its location made it easy to check the gin's operation and serve the steady flow of farmers with mule-drawn wagons.

## Teacher's House

Sharecroppers, or tenant farmers, helped farm the Shields-Ethridge property. Their homes were near main roads near the farm. By 1940 about 13 sharecropper families worked between 15 and 30 acres of the farm, in exchange for housing, equipment and supplies. Today, only two of the tenant houses are still standing.

In 1938 an African American teacher came to live in a house which had been used by a tenant farmer since 1912. Originally, the house was 15 by 20 feet, and had only one room. It was enlarged for the teacher, with an addition of a bedroom and kitchen. The house has been known as *The Teacher's House* since 1938.

## School House

The Bachelors' Academy is the only school house that has been completely restored in Jackson County, Georgia. A Georgia Heritage grant made restoration of the building possible in 1996. The school house is part of the National Historic District and was built on a hill, a half mile down Ethridge Road.

Ira Ethridge, son-in law of Joseph Robert Shields took charge of constructing a new county school near the old Shields home place. In 1909 he persuaded two Shields cousins, Alex and Emory, to donate land where a school could be built. The school was named *The Bachelors' Academy* in honor of the land donors, grandsons of



*Bachelor's Academy 1915. Teacher, Miss Dunnagan. Built 1909 on land donated to the county by members of the Shields family*

James Shields. A neighbor, Harvey Robert Carruth, built the two-room school house for \$343.20, and installed a bell in the bell tower costing \$18.00.

Grades one through seven were taught at the Bachelors' Academy until 1950. A teacher was employed for the Bachelors' Academy by the county, and from 1909 to 1938 the teacher lived at the Ethridge home during the school term.

Inside one room there are desks and a pot-bellied stove. A *cloakroom* remains, where children hung their coats. The adjacent room is now used for displays, but until 1950 it was an assembly room for the school and the community. Plays, cakewalks, box suppers, and spelling bees were held in the large, open room equipped with a stage and a wooden partition to the second room.

There was neither water nor electricity at the Bachelors' Academy. A well sits in front of the School House, covered by a shed with a tin roof. Children *drew* water from the well for drinking.

One can imagine the routine of a school day. Children raised a flag every morning. A daily honor was ringing the school bell. Elders who attended Bachelors' Academy remember being lifted off their feet by the bell rope. Sadly, the bell was stolen many years ago and the bell tower awaits the bell's return. Children brought their lunch from home in a bucket and sat in the grass outside to eat. Slate blackboards and chalk were used for instruction, and older children helped younger ones with their lessons. On fair days, children sat in the open window sills, watching chickens play beneath the school house.

The Bachelors' Academy is described as a *relatively rare historic homestead school* in the Historic District nomination documents. The Shields-Ethridge Heritage Farm Foundation is gathering oral histories from former students at the Academy to preserve the experience of learning in a two-room school house.

## Main Residence

Joseph Robert Shields built the present main residence when he returned from serving in the War Between the States. Before leaving for the war, he purchased 96 acres of land from his father, James Shields. Today, descendants of Joseph Robert Shields live in the main residence; therefore it is not a part of the National Historic District.

When Susan Ella Shields Ethridge and her husband, Ira, came to live at the home place in 1897 to care for the aged Joseph Robert Shields, the house had a one-story shed front. The home place was a *plantation plain* house, like many country houses in Georgia and the Carolinas. The house had four rooms in the body of the house and two shed rooms behind. After Joseph Robert Shields' death in 1909, the place became known as the *Ethridge Place* and Ira Ethridge began the remodeling of the old Shields home place. The shed porch was replaced with four 15 inch square columns of stuccoed finish. A cantilevered balcony was then added, and later, screened.

Ethridge also installed an iron fence around the yard in 1921, which was bought at a sale when the fence was removed from Rabun County courthouse square.

As you look at the exterior of the house, imagine the original windows: nine-over-nines. The upstairs windows remain six-over-sixes. Notice the three chimneys that date to the original construction. Originally the main dwelling was heated with open wood fires. Coal or wood stoves were later used, and today the newest addition is heated by electricity. Originally, a log house kitchen was placed forty feet from the side of the main dwelling. The kitchen was moved in 1910 to another place on the farm.

Ira Ethridge made modifications through the years to accommodate modern living, adding a dining room and kitchen (*built to the rear*), a sunroom, and a lattice porch. Reminders of the long history of the oldest rooms in the main residence are the 8 foot ceilings, the original pine boards of random width (*5 to 11 inches*), handcrafted pine mantles, doors of heart pine, and the double two-paneled front door framed by a transom and sidelights.

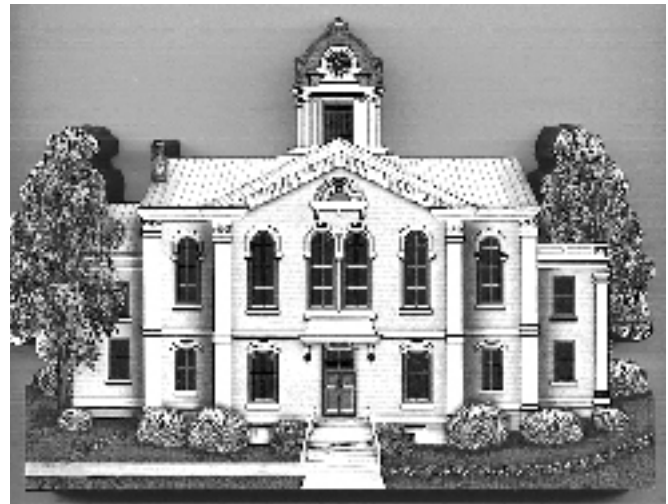
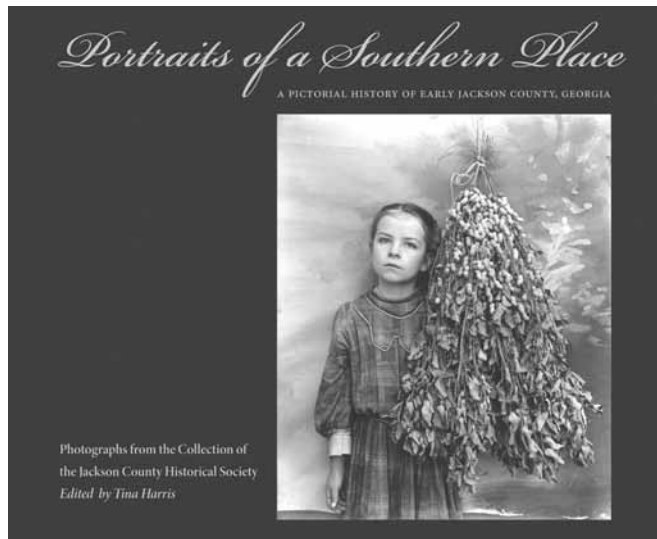


*The main house on the Shields-Ethridge Farm was remodeled by Ira Ethridge in 1909*



## Portraits of a Southern Place

This is a reprint in paperback of our 2007 hardback publication. The price of \$25.00 includes tax. Checks and money orders can be made to The Jackson County Historical Society. The book is available in Jackson County at special locations or send a check to JCHS, P. O. Box 1234, Commerce, GA 30529, Shipping cost is \$3.00 per book. Call Tina for special deliveries (706)207-6889 or [tina313@mindspring.com](mailto:tina313@mindspring.com)



## Jackson County Historic Courthouse Replica

The Jackson County Historical Society is selling an architectural replica of the Jackson County Historic Courthouse with proceeds going to the restoration project. Replica's can be purchased at Genuine Jefferson on Washington Street, Jefferson. For more information call Charlotte Mealor at 706-757-2471 or [cmealor@uga.edu](mailto:cmealor@uga.edu).

## Jackson County Historical Society

P.O. Box 1234 Commerce, Georgia 30529